T. S. Eliot (1888-1965)

Thomas Stearns Eliot OM (September 26, 1888 – January 4, 1965) was an American-born English poet, playwright, and literary critic, arguably the most important English-language poet of the 20th century.[4] The poem that made his name, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock—started in 1910 and published in Chicago in 1915—is regarded as a masterpiece of the modernist movement. He followed this with what have become some of the best-known poems in the English language, including Gerontion (1920), The Waste Land (1922), The Hollow Men (1925), Ash Wednesday (1930), and Four Quartets (1945).[5] He is also known for his seven plays, particularly Murder in the Cathedral (1935). He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1948.

Born in St. Louis, Missouri, Eliot went east for college and was educated at Harvard. After graduation, he studied philosophy at the Sorbonne for a year, then won a scholarship to Oxford in 1914. He became a British citizen at the age of 39. "[M]y poetry has obviously more in common with my distinguished contemporaries in America than with anything written in my generation in England," he said of his nationality and its role in his work. "It wouldn't be what it is, and I imagine it wouldn't be so good ... if I'd been born in England, and it wouldn't be what it is if I'd stayed in America. It's a combination of things. But in its sources, in its emotional springs, it comes from America." Eliot renounced his citizenship to the United States and said: "My mind may be American but my heart is British".[6]

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[edit] Life
[edit] Early life and education

Eliot was born into the Eliot family, a bourgeois family[7] originally from New England, who had moved to St. Louis, Missouri.[5] His father, Henry Ware Eliot (1843–1919), was a successful businessman, president and treasurer of the Hydraulic-Press Brick Company in St. Louis. Eliot credits his hometown with seeding his literary vision: "It is self-evident that St. Louis affected me more deeply than any other environment has ever done. I feel that there is something in having passed one's childhood beside the big river, which is incommunicable to those people who have not. I consider myself fortunate to have been born here, rather than in Boston, or New York, or London."[8] His mother, Charlotte Champe Stearns (1843–1929), wrote poetry and was a social worker, a new profession in the early 20th century. Eliot was the last of six surviving children; his parents were both 44 years old when he was born. His four sisters were between 11 and 19 years older; his brother was eight years older. Known to family and friends as Tom, he was the namesake of his maternal grandfather Thomas Stearns.

From 1898 to 1905, Eliot attended Smith Academy, where his studies included Latin, Ancient Greek, French, and German. He began to write poetry when he was 14 under the influence of Edward Fitzgerald's Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, a translation of the poetry of Omar Khayyam. He said the results were gloomy and despairing, and he destroyed them. His oldest surviving poem, an untitled lyric, dates from January 1905. The first poem that he showed anyone, "A Fable For Feasters," was written as a school exercise when he was 15, and was published in the Smith Academy Record, and later in The Harvard Advocate, Harvard University's student magazine.[9]

After graduation, Eliot attended Milton Academy in Massachusetts for a preparatory year, where he met Scofield Thayer, who would later publish The Waste Land. He studied philosophy at Harvard from 1906 to 1909, earning his bachelor's degree after three years, instead of the usual four.[5] Frank Kermode writes that the most important moment of Eliot's undergraduate career was in 1908, when he discovered Arthur Symons's The Symbolist Movement in Literature (1899). This introduced him to Jules Laforgue, Arthur Rimbaud, and Paul Verlaine. Without Verlaine, Eliot wrote, he might never have heard of Tristan Corbière and his book Les amour jaunes, a work that affected the course of Eliot's life.[10] The Harvard Advocate published some of his poems, and he became lifelong friends with Conrad Aiken, the American novelist.

After working as a philosophy assistant at Harvard from 1909–1910, Eliot moved to Paris, where from 1910–1911, he studied philosophy at the Sorbonne. He attended lectures by Henri Bergson and read poetry with Alain-Fournier.[5][10] From 1911–1914, he was back at Harvard studying Indian philosophy and Sanskrit.[5][11] Eliot was awarded a scholarship to

Merton College, Oxford in 1914. He first visited Marburg, Germany, where he planned to take a summer program, but when the First World War broke out, he went to Oxford instead. At the time, so many American students attended Merton that the Junior Common Room proposed a motion "that this society abhors the Americanization of Oxford"; it was defeated by two votes after Eliot reminded the students how much they owed American culture.[12]

Eliot did not settle at Merton, and left after a year. He wrote to Conrad Aiken on New Year's Eve 1914: "I hate university towns and university people, who are the same everywhere, with pregnant wives, sprawling children, many books and hideous pictures on the walls ... Oxford is very pretty, but I don't like to be dead."[12] By 1916, he had completed a PhD dissertation for Harvard on Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley, about F. H. Bradley,[13] but he failed to return for the viva voce exam.[5]

[edit] Marriage

Vivienne Haigh-Wood Eliot (left), with Peter Stainer and Mildred Woodruff, photographed by Lady Ottoline Morrell

In a letter to Aiken late in December 1914, Eliot, aged 26, wrote, "I am very dependent upon women (I mean female society)."[14] Less than four months later, Thayer introduced Eliot to Vivienne Haigh-Wood, a Cambridge governess. They were married at Hampstead Register Office on June 26, 1915.[15]

After a short visit alone to his family in the United States, Eliot returned to London and took several teaching jobs, such as lecturing at Birkbeck College, University of London. The philosopher Bertrand Russell took an interest in Vivienne while the newlyweds stayed in his flat. Some scholars have suggested that she and Russell had an affair, but the allegations were never confirmed.[16] In a private paper written in his sixties, Eliot confessed: "I came to persuade myself that I was in love with Vivienne simply because I wanted to burn my boats and commit myself to staying in England. And she persuaded herself (also under the influence of [Ezra] Pound) that she would save the poet by keeping him in England. To her, the marriage brought no happiness. To me, it brought the state of mind out of which came The Waste Land."[17] (Their relationship was the subject of a 1984 play Tom and Viv, which in 1994 was adapted as a film.)

[edit] Teaching, Lloyds, Faber and Faber

A plaque at SOAS's Faber Building, 24 Russell Square, London.

After leaving Merton, Eliot worked as a schoolteacher, most notably at Highgate School, a private school in London, where he taught French and Latin[5]—his students included the young John Betjeman. Later he taught at the Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe, a state school in Buckinghamshire. To earn extra money, he wrote book reviews and lectured at evening extension courses. In 1917, he took a position at Lloyds Bank in London, working on foreign accounts. On a trip to Paris in August 1920, he met the writer James Joyce and the artist Wyndham Lewis. Eliot said he found Joyce arrogant—Joyce doubted Eliot's ability as a poet at the time—but the two soon became friends, with Eliot's visiting Joyce whenever he was in Paris.[18]

In 1925, Eliot left Lloyds to join the publishing firm Faber and Gwyer, later Faber and Faber, where he remained for the rest of his career, eventually becoming a director. Wyndham Lewis and Eliot became close friends, a friendship leading to Lewis's well-known painting of Eliot in 1938.

[edit] Conversion to Anglicanism and British citizenship

On June 29, 1927 Eliot converted to Anglicanism from Unitarianism, and in November that year he took British citizenship. He became a warden of his parish church, Saint Stephen's, Gloucester Road, London,[19] and a life member of the Society of King Charles the Martyr.[20] He specifically identified as Anglo-Catholic, proclaiming himself "classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic [sic] in religion."[21][22]

[edit] Separation and remarriage

By 1932, Eliot had been contemplating a separation from his wife for some time. When Harvard offered him the Charles Eliot Norton professorship for the 1932-1933 academic year, he accepted and left Vivienne in England. Upon his return, he arranged for a formal separation from her, avoiding all but one meeting with her between his leaving for America in 1932 and her death in 1947. Vivienne was committed to the Northumberland House mental hospital, Stoke Newington, in 1938, and remained there until she died. Although Eliot was still legally her husband, he never visited her.[23]

From 1946 to 1957, Eliot shared a flat with his friend John Davy Hayward, who gathered and archived Eliot's papers, styling himself "Keeper of the Eliot Archive."[24] Hayward also collected Eliot's pre-Prufrock verse, commercially published after Eliot's death as Poems Written in Early Youth. When Eliot and Hayward separated their household in 1957, Hayward retained his collection of Eliot's papers, which he bequeathed to King's College, Cambridge in 1965.

On January 10, 1957, Eliot at the age of 68 married Esmé Valerie Fletcher, who was 32. In contrast to his first marriage, Eliot knew Fletcher well, as she had been his secretary at Faber and Faber since August 1949. They kept their wedding secret; the ceremony was held in a church at 6.15 a.m. with virtually no one in attendance other than his wife's parents. Since Eliot's death, Valerie has dedicated her time to preserving his legacy; she has edited and annotated The Letters of T. S. Eliot and a facsimile of the draft of The Waste Land. In the early 1960s, by then in failing health, Eliot worked as an editor for the Wesleyan University Press, seeking new poets in Europe for publication.[25]

[edit] Death and honors

Eliot died of emphysema in London on January 4, 1965. For many years he had had health problems caused by his heavy smoking, and had often been laid low with bronchitis or tachycardia. He was cremated at Golders Green Crematorium. In accordance with Eliot's wishes, his ashes were taken to St Michael's Church in East Coker, the village from which his ancestors had emigrated to America.

* A wall plaque commemorates him with a quotation from his poem "East Coker": "In my beginning is my end. In my end is my beginning."

* In 1967, on the second anniversary of his death, Eliot was commemorated by the installation of a large stone in the floor of Poets' Corner in London's Westminster Abbey. The stone, cut by designer Reynolds Stone, is inscribed with his life dates, his Order of Merit, and a quotation from his poem, "Little Gidding": "the communication / Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond / the language of the living."[26]

[edit] Poetry

For a poet of his stature, Eliot produced a relatively small amount of poetry. He was aware of this early in his career. He wrote to J. H. Woods, one of his former Harvard professors, that, "My reputation in London is built upon one small volume of verse, and is kept up by printing two or three more poems in a year. The only thing that matters is that these should be perfect in their kind, so that each should be an event."[27]

Typically, Eliot first published his poems individually in periodicals or in small books or pamphlets, and then collected them in books. His first collection was Prufrock and Other Observations (1917). In 1920, he published more poems in Ara Vos Prec (London) and Poems: 1920 (New York). These had the same poems (in a different order) except that "Ode" in the British edition was replaced with "Hysteria" in the American edition. In 1925, he collected The Waste Land and the poems in Prufrock and Poems into one volume and added The Hollow Men to form Poems: 1909–1925. From then on, he updated this work as Collected Poems. Exceptions are Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats (1939), a collection of light verse; Poems Written in Early Youth, posthumously published in 1967 and consisting mainly of poems published 1907–1910 in The Harvard Advocate,[28] and Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909–1917, material Eliot never intended to have published, which appeared posthumously in 1997.

[edit] The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

Main article: The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

In 1915 Ezra Pound, overseas editor of Poetry magazine, recommended to Harriet Monroe, the magazine's founder, that she publish "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". Although the character Prufrock seems to be middle-aged, Eliot wrote most of the poem when he was only 22. Its now-famous opening lines, comparing the evening sky to "a patient etherised upon a table," were considered shocking and offensive, especially at a time when Georgian Poetry was hailed for its derivations of the 19th century Romantic Poets. The poem follows the conscious experience of a man, Prufrock (relayed in the "stream of consciousness" form characteristic of the Modernists), lamenting his physical and intellectual inertia, the lost opportunities in his life and lack of spiritual progress, with the recurrent theme of carnal love unattained. Critical opinion is divided as to whether the narrator leaves his residence during the course of the narration. The locations described can be interpreted either as actual physical experiences, mental recollections, or as symbolic images from the sub-conscious mind, as, for example, in the refrain "In the room the women come and go." The poem's structure was heavily influenced by Eliot's

extensive reading of Dante Alighieri, in the Italian, and refers to a number of literary works, including Hamlet and those of the French Symbolists.

Its reception in London can be gauged from an unsigned review in The Times Literary Supplement on June 21, 1917: "The fact that these things occurred to the mind of Mr Eliot is surely of the very smallest importance to anyone, even to himself. They certainly have no relation to poetry…"[29]

[edit] The Waste Land

Main article: The Waste Land

In October 1922 Eliot published The Waste Land in The Criterion. Eliot's dedication to il miglior fabbro ("the better craftsman") refers to Ezra Pound's significant hand in editing and reshaping the poem from a longer Eliot manuscript to the shortened version that appears in publication.[30] It was composed during a period of personal difficulty for Eliot—his marriage was failing, and both he and Vivien were suffering from nervous disorders. The poem is often read as a representation of the disillusionment of the post-war generation. That year Eliot lived in Lausanne, Switzerland to take a treatment and to convalesce from a break-down. There he wrote the final section, "What the Thunder Said," which contains frequent references to mountains.[31] Before the poem's publication as a book in December 1922, Eliot distanced himself from its vision of despair. On November 15, 1922, he wrote to Richard Aldington, saying, "As for The Waste Land, that is a thing of the past so far as I am concerned and I am now feeling toward a new form and style." The poem is known for its obscure nature—its slippage between satire and prophecy; its abrupt changes of speaker, location, and time.[citation needed] Despite this, it has become a touchstone of modern literature, a poetic counterpart to a novel published in the same year, James Joyce's Ulysses. Among its best-known phrases are "April is the cruellest month", "I will show you fear in a handful of dust"; and "Shantih shantih shantih," the Sanskrit mantra that ends the poem.

[edit] The Hollow Men

Main articles: The Hollow Men and The Hollow Men in popular culture

The Hollow Men appeared in 1925. For the critic Edmund Wilson, it marked "the nadir of the phase of despair and desolation given such effective expression in The Waste Land."[32] It is Eliot's major poem of the late twenties. Similar to other work, its themes are overlapping and fragmentary: post-war Europe under the Treaty of Versailles (which Eliot despised); the difficulty of hope and religious conversion; and Eliot's failed marriage.[33]

Allen Tate perceived a shift in Eliot's method, writing that, "The mythologies disappear altogether in The Hollow Men." This is a striking claim for a poem as indebted to Dante as anything else in Eliot’s early work, to say little of the modern English mythology—the "Old Guy Fawkes" of the Gunpowder Plot—or the colonial and agrarian mythos of Joseph Conrad and James George Frazer, which, at least for reasons of textual history, echo in The Waste Land.[34] The "continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" that is so characteristic of his mythical method remained in fine form.[35] The Hollow Men contains some of Eliot's most famous lines[citation needed], notably its conclusion:

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.

[edit] Ash Wednesday
Main article: Ash Wednesday (poem)

Ash Wednesday is the first long poem written by Eliot after his 1927 conversion to Anglicanism. Published in 1930, it deals with the struggle that ensues when one who has lacked faith acquires it. Sometimes referred to as Eliot's "conversion poem," it is richly but ambiguously allusive, and deals with the aspiration to move from spiritual barrenness to hope for human salvation. The style is different from the poetry that predates his conversion. Ash Wednesday and the poems that followed had a more casual, melodic, and contemplative method.[citation needed]

Many critics were particularly enthusiastic about it. Edwin Muir maintained that it is one of the most moving poems Eliot wrote, and perhaps the "most perfect,"[36] though it was not well-received by everyone. The poem's groundwork of orthodox Christianity discomfited many of the more secular literati.[5]
[edit] Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats
Main article: Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats

In 1930, Eliot published a book of light verse, Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats ("Old Possum" was Ezra Pound's nickname for him). This first edition had an illustration of the author on the cover. In 1954, the composer Alan Rawsthorne set six of the poems for speaker and orchestra, in a work entitled Practical Cats. After Eliot's death, the book was adapted as the basis of the musical, Cats, by Andrew Lloyd Webber, first produced in London's West End in 1981 and opening on Broadway the following year.
[edit] Four Quartets
Main article: Four Quartets

Eliot regarded Four Quartets as his masterpiece, and it is the work that led to his being awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.[5] It consists of four long poems, each first published separately: Burnt Norton (1936), East Coker (1940), The Dry Salvages (1941) and Little Gidding (1942). Each has five sections. Although they resist easy characterisation, each begins with a rumination on the geographical location of its title, and each meditates on the nature of time in some important respect—theological, historical, physical—and its relation to the human condition. Each poem is associated with one of the four classical elements: air, earth, water, and fire.

Burnt Norton asks what it means to consider things that might have been. We see the shell of an abandoned house, and Eliot toys with the idea that all these merely possible realities are present together, invisible to us. All the possible ways people might walk across a courtyard add up to a vast dance we can't see; children who aren't there are hiding in the bushes.

Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden.[37]

East Coker continues the examination of time and meaning, focusing in a famous passage on the nature of language and poetry. Out of darkness, Eliot offers a solution: "I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope".

The Dry Salvages treats the element of water, via images of river and sea. It strives to contain opposites: "... the past and future/Are conquered, and reconciled".

Little Gidding (the element of fire) is the most anthologized of the Quartets. Eliot's experiences as an air raid warden in The Blitz power the poem, and he imagines meeting Dante during the German bombing. The beginning of the Quartets ("Houses .../Are removed, destroyed") had become a violent everyday experience; this creates an animation, where for the first time he talks of Love as the driving force behind all experience. From this background, the Quartets end with an affirmation of Julian of Norwich: "all shall be well and/All manner of thing shall be well".

The Four Quartets cannot be understood without reference to Christian thought, traditions, and history. Eliot draws upon the theology, art, symbolism and language of such figures as Dante, and mystics St. John of the Cross and Julian of Norwich. The "deeper communion" sought in East Coker, the "hints and whispers of children, the sickness that must grow worse in order to find healing," and the exploration which inevitably leads us home all point to the pilgrim's path along the road of sanctification.

[edit] Plays

Main articles: Murder in the Cathedral, The Rock (play), The Family Reunion, The Cocktail Party, The Confidential Clerk, and The Elder Statesman

With the important exception of his magnum opus Four Quartets, Eliot directed much of his creative energies after Ash Wednesday to writing plays in verse, mostly comedies or plays with redemptive endings. He was long a critic and admirer of Elizabethan and Jacobean verse drama; witness his allusions to Webster, Thomas Middleton, William Shakespeare and Thomas Kyd in The Waste Land. In a 1933 lecture he said: "Every poet would like, I fancy, to be able to think that he had some direct social utility. ... He would like to be something of a popular entertainer, and be able to think his own thoughts behind a tragic or a comic mask. He would like to convey the pleasures of poetry, not only to a larger audience, but to larger groups of people collectively; and the theatre is the best place in which to do it."[38]

After The Waste Land (1922), he wrote that he was "now feeling toward a new form and style." One project he had in mind was writing a play in verse with a jazz tempo featuring Sweeney, a character who had appeared in a number of his poems. Eliot did not finish it. He did publish separately

two pieces of what he had written. The two, Fragment of a Prologue (1926) and Fragment of an Agon (1927) were published together in 1932 as Sweeney Agonistes. Although Eliot noted that this was not intended to be a one-act play, it is sometimes performed as one.[39]

A pageant play by Eliot called The Rock was performed in 1934 for the benefit of churches in the Diocese of London. Much of it was a collaborative effort; Eliot accepted credit only for the authorship of one scene and the choruses.[39] George Bell, the Bishop of Chichester, had been instrumental in connecting Eliot with producer E. Martin Browne for the production of The Rock, and later asked Eliot to write another play for the Canterbury Festival in 1935. This one, Murder in the Cathedral, concerning the death of the martyr, Thomas Becket, was more under Eliot's control. After this, he worked on commercial plays for more general audiences: The Family Reunion (1939), The Cocktail Party (1949), The Confidential Clerk, (1953) and The Elder Statesman (1958). The Broadway production in New York of The Cocktail Party received the 1950 Tony Award for Best Play.

[edit] Literary criticism

Eliot also made significant contributions to the field of literary criticism, strongly influencing the school of New Criticism. While somewhat self-deprecating and minimizing of his work—he once said his criticism was merely a "by-product" of his "private poetry-workshop"[40]—Eliot is considered by some to be one of the greatest literary critics of the 20th century. The critic William Empson once said, "I do not know for certain how much of my own mind [Eliot] invented, let alone how much of it is a reaction against him or indeed a consequence of misreading him. He is a very penetrating influence, perhaps not unlike the east wind."[41]

In his critical essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot argues that art must be understood not in a vacuum, but in the context of previous pieces of art: "In a peculiar sense [an artist or poet] ... must inevitably be judged by the standards of the past."[40] This essay was one of the most important works of the school of New Criticism. Specifically, it introduced the idea that the value of one work of art must be viewed in the context of all previous works, a "simultaneous order" of works. Eliot himself employed this concept on many of his works, especially on his long-poem The Waste Land.[42]

Also important to New Criticism was the idea—as articulated in Eliot's essay "Hamlet and His Problems"[43]—of an "objective correlative," which posits a connection among the words of the text and events, states of mind, and experiences. This notion concedes that a poem means what it says, but suggests that there can be a non-subjective judgment based on different readers' different—but perhaps corollary—interpretations of a work.

More generally, New Critics took a cue from Eliot in regard to his "'classical' ideals and his religious thought; his attention to the poetry and drama of the early seventeenth century; his deprecation of the Romantics, especially Shelley; his proposition that good poems constitute 'not a turning loose of emotion but an escape from emotion'; and his insistence that 'poets…at present must be difficult.'"[44]

Eliot’s essays were a major factor in the revival of interest in the metaphysical poets. Eliot particularly praised the metaphysical poets' ability to show experience as both psychological and sensual, while at the same time infusing this portrayal with—in Eliot's view—wit and uniqueness. Eliot's essay "The Metaphysical Poets," along with giving new significance and attention to metaphysical poetry, introduced his now well-known definition of "unified sensibility,"[45] which is considered by some to mean the same thing as the term "metaphysical."[46]

His 1922 poem The Waste Land[47]—which at the time of its publication, many critics believed to be a joke or hoax[48]—also can be better understood in light of his work as a critic. He had argued that a poet must write “programmatic criticism"; that is, a poet should write to advance his own interests rather than to advance “historical scholarship". Viewed from Eliot's critical lens, The Waste Land likely shows his personal despair about World War I rather than an objective historical understanding of it.[49]

In 1946 Eliot was a member of a group otherwise composed of senior clergy which produced a report entitled "Catholicity" published in 1947 as a contribution to the process which resulted in the Church of England's Report on Doctrine (1948).

In 1958, the Archbishop of Canterbury appointed Eliot to a commission that produced The Revised Psalter (1963). A harsh critic of Eliot, C. S. Lewis, was also a member of the commission, where their antagonism turned into a friendship.[50]
[edit] Critical reception
[edit] Response to his poetry and literary criticism

Eliot's poetry was first criticized as not being poetry at all. Many critics attacked his practice of widespread interweaving of quotations from other authors into his work. "Notes on the Waste Land," which follows the poem, gives the source of many of these, but not all. Eliot defended this as a necessary salvaging of tradition in an age of fragmentation, and completely integral to the work, adding richness through unexpected juxtaposition. Other critics have condemned the practice as showing a lack of originality, and for plagiarism. The prominent critic F. W. Bateson published an essay called "T. S. Eliot: The Poetry of Pseudo-Learning". Eliot wrote in The Sacred Wood: "Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different."

Canadian academic Robert Ian Scott pointed out that the title of The Waste Land and some of the images had previously appeared in the work of a minor Kentucky poet, Madison Cawein (1865–1914). Bevis Hillier compared Cawein's lines "… come and go/Around its ancient portico" with Eliot's "… come and go/talking of Michelangelo". (This line actually appears in Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", and not in The Waste Land.) Cawein's "Waste Land" had appeared in the January 1913 issue of the Chicago magazine Poetry (which contained an article by Ezra Pound on London poets). But scholars are continually finding new sources for Eliot's Waste Land, often in odd places.

Many famous fellow writers and critics have paid tribute to Eliot. According to poet Ted Hughes, "Each year Eliot's presence reasserts itself at a deeper level, to an audience that is surprised to find itself more chastened, more astonished, more humble." Hugh Kenner commented, "He has been the most gifted and influential literary critic in English in the twentieth century." However, other writers have not supported this view.[51]

C. S. Lewis thought Eliot's literary criticism "superficial and unscholarly". In a 1935 letter to a mutual friend of theirs, Paul Elmer More, Lewis wrote that he considered the work of Eliot to be "a very great evil."[50] In a 1943 letter to Eliot, Lewis expressed both admiration along with antagonism toward his views when he wrote: "I hope the fact that I find myself often contradicting you in print gives no offence; it is a kind of tribute to you—whenever I fall foul of some widespread contemporary view about literature I always seem to find that you have expressed it most clearly. One aims at the officers first in meeting an attack!"[50]

[edit] Allegations of anti-Semitism

The depiction of Jews in some of Eliot's poems has led several critics to accuse him of anti-Semitism. The book that makes the strongest case for anti-Semitism in Eliot's work is Anthony Julius's T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form (1996).[52][53]

There are quite a few examples from Eliot's early poetry that have been characterized as anti-Semitic. For instance, the poem Gerontion contains a depiction of a landlord referred to as the "jew [who] squats on the window sill." Also, the poem Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar contains the lines: "The rats are underneath the piles/ The Jew is underneath the lot." Julius writes of this poem that, "the anti-Semitism is unmistakable." In A Cooking Egg, Eliot writes, "The red-eyed scavengers are creeping/ From Kentish Town and Golder's Green" (Golders Green is a largely Jewish suburb of London). On the other hand, the publisher of Gerontion and Burbank was John Rodker, himself Jewish. Additionally, Eliot mailed a draft of Gerontion to his friend Sidney Schiff, also a Jew, for pre-publication editing and commentary. A third "anti-Semitic"[citation needed] poem, Sweeney Among the Nightingales, was published by Eliot's Jewish friend Leonard Woolf. None of these men considered the poems anti-Semitic.[54]

In a series of lectures delivered at the University of Virginia in 1933, later published under the title After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy (1934), Eliot wrote, regarding a homogeneity of culture, "What is still more important [in society] is unity of religious background, and reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable."[55] Although he later disavowed the book, it is unclear which aspects of the book Eliot found objectionable and whether his disavowal was a refutation of the anti-Semitic comments in the book (which are limited to a few sentences out of the entire work).

One of the first protests against Eliot on the subject of anti-Semitism came in the form of a poem from the Anglo-Jewish writer and poet Emanuel

Litvinoff, read out during an inaugural poetry reading for the Institute of Contemporary Arts in 1951, attended by Eliot.[56] Only a few years after the Holocaust, Eliot had republished lines originally written in the 1920s about "money in furs" and the "protozoic slime" of Bleistein's "lustreless, protrusive eye" in his Selected Poems of 1948, angering Litvinoff. Litvinoff read out his poem, entitled "To T. S. Eliot," to a packed but silent room, ending with the lines, "Let your words/tread lightly on this earth of Europe/lest my people's bones protest".

There was an absolute shocked silence. When I finished reading it Herbert Read said to me "if I had known that you were going to read such a poem I would never have allowed it" and I thought "eh and you're an anarchist?" Then hell broke loose and I remember particularly Stephen Spender getting up and saying "as a poet as Jewish as Litvinoff, I'm outraged by this unwanted, undeserved attack on my friend T.S. Eliot" and so on and so forth ... Apparently Eliot was heard to mutter, he had his head down leaning on a chair, to his entourage "it's a good poem."[56]

Leonard Woolf, husband of Virginia Woolf, who was himself Jewish and a friend of Eliot's, judged that Eliot was probably "slightly anti-Semitic in the sort of vague way which is not uncommon. He would have denied it quite genuinely."[57] In 2003, Professor Ronald Schuchard of Emory University published details of a previously unknown cache of letters from Eliot to Horace Kallen, which reveal that in the early 1940s Eliot was actively helping Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria to re-settle in Britain and America. In letters written after the war, Eliot also voiced support for the state of Israel.[58]

In 2009, Faber published Volume 2 of Eliot's letters, and reissued Volume 1 with 200 new letters. Craig Raine, who is one of the few critics to try to defend Eliot against charges of anti-Semitism, writes that the letters reveal some of Eliot's correspondents as flagrant anti-Semites, though Eliot himself was more restrained. Eliot's mother writes, "I have an instinctive antipathy to Jews, just as I have to certain animals," while his legal and literary representative in New York, John Quinn, writes of the streets being "infested ... with swarms of horrible looking Jews, low, squat, animal-like." Eliot complains to Quinn that he is annoyed with his publisher in the U.S., Horace Liveright, who was Jewish, and that, "I am sick of doing business with Jew [sic] publishers who will not carry out their part of the contract unless they are forced to," though he goes on to write in not dissimilar terms about Christian publishers too: "I wish I could find a decent Christian publisher in New York who could be trusted..."[59]

[edit] Awards

Further information: Cultural depictions of T. S. Eliot

* Order of Merit (awarded by King George VI (United Kingdom), 1948)
* Nobel Prize for Literature "for his outstanding, pioneer contribution to present-day poetry" (Stockholm, 1948)
* Officier de la Legion d'Honneur (1951)
* Hanseatic Goethe Prize (Hamburg, 1955)
* Dante Medal (Florence, 1959)
* Commandeur de l'ordre des Arts et des Lettres, (1960)
* Presidential Medal of Freedom (1964)

* 13 honorary doctorates (including Oxford, Cambridge, the Sorbonne, and Harvard)
* Tony Award in 1950 for Best Play: The Broadway production of The Cocktail Party.
* Two posthumous Tony Awards (1983) for his poems used in the musical Cats
* Eliot College of the University of Kent, England, named after him
* Celebrated on commemorative postage stamps
* A star on the St. Louis Walk of Fame

[edit] Works

[edit] Poetry

* Prufrock and Other Observations (1917)
  - The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock
  - Portrait of a Lady (poem)
  - Aunt Helen
* Poems (1920)
  - Gerontion
  - Sweeney Among the Nightingales
  - "The Hippopotamus"
  - "Whispers of Immortality"
  - "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service"
  - "A Cooking Egg"
* The Waste Land (1922)
* The Hollow Men (1925)
* Ariel Poems (1927–1954)
  - The Journey of the Magi (1927)
* Ash Wednesday (1930)
* Coriolan (1931)
* Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats (1939)
* The Marching Song of the Pollicle Dogs and Billy M'Caw: The Remarkable Parrot (1939) in The Queen's Book of the Red Cross
* Four Quartets (1945)

[edit] Plays

* Sweeney Agonistes (published in 1926, first performed in 1934)
* The Rock (1934)
* Murder in the Cathedral (1935)
* The Family Reunion (1939)
* The Cocktail Party (1949)
* The Confidential Clerk (1953)
* The Elder Statesman (first performed in 1958, published in 1959)

[edit] Nonfiction

* Christianity & Culture (1939, 1948)
* The Second-Order Mind (1920)
* Tradition and the Individual Talent (1920)
* The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism (1920)
  - "Hamlet and His Problems"
* Homage to John Dryden (1924)
* Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca (1928)

* For Lancelot Andrewes (1928)
* Dante (1929)
* Selected Essays, 1917–1932 (1932)
* The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (1933)
* After Strange Gods (1934)
* Elizabethan Essays (1934)
* Essays Ancient and Modern (1936)
* The Idea of a Christian Society (1939)
* A Choice of Kipling's Verse (1941) made by Eliot, with an essay on Rudyard Kipling, London, Faber and Faber.
* Notes Towards the Definition of Culture (1948)
* Poetry and Drama (1951)
* The Three Voices of Poetry (1954)
* The Frontiers of Criticism (1956)
* On Poetry and Poets (1957)

[edit] Posthumous publications

* To Criticize the Critic (1965)
* The Waste Land: Facsimile Edition (1974)
* Inventions of the March Hare: Poems 1909-1917 (1996)

[edit] Critical editions

* Collected Poems, 1909-1962 (1963) online edition; also excerpt and text search
* Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats, Illustrated Edition (1982) excerpt and text search
* Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot ed. by Frank Kermode (1975) excerpt and text search
* The Waste Land (Norton Critical Editions) ed. by Michael North (2000) excerpt and text search
* Selected essays (1932); enlarged (1960)
* The letters of T. S. Eliot, ed. Valerie Eliot, vol. 1: 1898-1922 (1988)
* The letters of T. S. Eliot, ed. Valerie Eliot, vol. 2: 1923-1925 (2009)

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* Eliot's grave
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* Recordings of Eliot reading from "Prufrock" and The Waste Land
* Biography From T. S. Eliot Lives' and Legacies
* Archival material relating to T. S. Eliot listed at the UK National Register of Archives
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